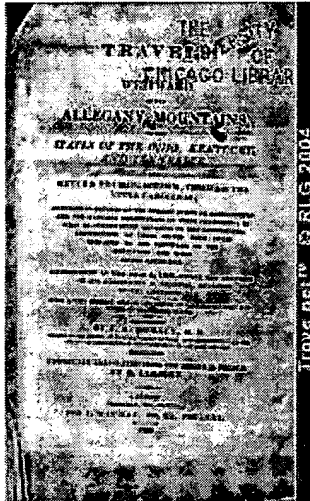


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Travels to the westward of the Allegany mountains, in the states of Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee, and return to Charlestown, ...

Michaux, Francois Andre



Travels to the westward of the Allegany mountains, in the states of Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee, and return to Charlestown, through the upper Carolinas; containing details on the present state of agriculture and the natural production of these countries; as well as information relative to the commercial connections of these states with those situated to the eastward of the mountains and with lower Louisiana. Undertaken in the year x, 1802, under the auspices of His Excellency M. Chaptal, minister of the interior. With a very correct map of the states in the centre, west and south of the United States. Page 1

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Internet investigating—online planning for a perfect trip to Germany & Austria

Jennifer Petoff

Outfitted with a rudimentary knowledge of German and a jam-packed itinerary populated with ideas gleaned from the Internet (e.g., www.europeforvisitors.com), my husband and I embarked on a 9-day trip around southern Germany in September '04. Our adventures took us from Munich along the Bavarian Alps to the outskirts of Frankfurt via the Romantic Road.

Careful planning

In anticipation of this first visit to the region, we took an introductory German course at our local community college. If you work for a large company, it is worth investigating their educational reimbursement policy. My employer agreed to pay for the tuition (reasonably priced at \$350) and textbooks.

The class was particularly valuable in that it allowed us to interact more respectfully and confidently with those we would meet during our travels. In addition, the cultural insights imparted by the professor provided a more well-rounded and rich learning experience compared to the do-it-yourself language tapes we had used for past trips abroad.

My husband runs his own software company and sets his own hours. However, I work full time and receive only three weeks of vacation per year. Therefore, it was exceedingly important to have a coherent trip plan in place prior to departure to help maximize each day's enjoyment.

We used the resources on the Internet to research our travel arrangements, including airfare, rental car and hotels. We collected a wide variety of ideas for our trip, including which towns we would visit, museum possibilities, shopping opportunities, restaurant reviews and potential excursions. We organized a day-by-day trip plan using Vacation Designer[™] on CD-ROM, a product developed by my husband for the traveling public, and coupled our itinerary with detailed driving directions prepared using Microsoft[r] MapPoint Europe.

Putting the wheels in motion

Our trip began with an overnight flight on Air France from Philadelphia to Munich via Paris. The flight, which we found at www.onetravel.com, was over \$100 cheaper than the next-lowest-priced fare, illustrating that it pays to comparison shop at the major travel reservation websites.

We arrived in Munich at midday and took the train from the airport to the Hauptbahnhof. The Hotel Condor (Zweigstrasse 6; fax 011 49 89 55 30 69 or visit www.hotelcondor.de) was conveniently situated near the train station and was an easy walk away. Our room cost 90 [euro] (near \$108), including a generous breakfast buffet.

We located the hotel using www.tripadvisor.com, where reviews from actual guests described the quality of this establishment and revealed the availability of an Internet-connected PC in the lobby. This important amenity simplified my husband's task of running his company while on the road.

After researching the options online, we reserved all of our hotels using "old-fashioned" technology, the fax machine. Each of the value-priced hotels allowed direct booking but required a credit card guarantee. It is more secure to fax that sensitive

information than send it via e-mail. To save money on the international call from the U.S. to Europe, we used 10-10-220 (www.10-10-220.com), bringing the cost of the call down to 34 cents per minute.

Jumping in

After checking in, we strolled to the Marienplatz and stopped to fortify ourselves against jet lag at the cafe Rischart (Marienplatz 18). Rischart is a self-service (selbstbedienung) restaurant chain specializing in delectable desserts, rich coffee, sandwiches and Bavarian-style pretzels.

We found that selbstbedienung is an easy way to enjoy a quick snack without wrestling with a non-English menu. We were able to try a few words of German and supplement our communication with a nod in the direction of the desired item combined with a smile and "Bitte" ("Please").

While we thoroughly enjoyed exploring the traditional tourist hot spots in Munich, the experience was enriched further by the interactions we had with those we met. I was especially proud of myself as I purchased a pair of shoes, conducting the transaction entirely in German.

When my husband came down with a cold, I was able to ask an employee in the Galeria Kaufhof near our hotel, "Wo sind die Papiertiicher, bitte?" ("Where are the tissues, please?")

We were heartened when a Flemish gentleman came to our aid as we struggled to prop our camera on an empty beer mug at the Hofbrauhaus. He volunteered to take our picture, and once the photo op was captured, he and his Dutch friend joined us for a beer.

Hitting the road

After spending two days in Munich, we picked up a car that we had reserved in advance from Avis (www.avis.com). By choosing a rental car location not at the train station or airport, we saved more than 50 [euro]. We were thrilled to find that we had been upgraded from a mid-sized car with a standard transmission to a powerful, automatic Volvo at no extra charge.

We were soon on our way to Salzburg for the day. In order to drive in Austria, a Vignette (toll sticker) is required, available for purchase at rest areas (Raststationen) leading up to the border (about 7 [euro] for 10 days). With each passing mile, I grew more confident in our zippy vehicle and was emboldened to accelerate to over 100 mph (160 km/h) on a speed limit-free section of the Autobahn.

When driving in Germany and Austria, it is a good idea to become familiar with the local geography prior to embarking on a road trip. In contrast to road signs in the U.S., which clearly indicate the direction you are traveling, the only directional clues on German signs are the names of upcoming towns listed in order of proximity from bottom to top.

Salzburgers for a day

At the information office on the Mozartplatz, we purchased a 24-hour Salzburg Card that provided free access to a wide array of the city's major attractions and unlimited rides on public transportation for 19 [euro] (www.salzburg.info).

We toured the Hohensalzburg Fortress and Mozart's Geburtshaus (birthplace) and took a memorable cruise down the Salzach River. Our ship captain was a bit mischievous and at the end of the tour "danced" a waltz with the vessel, twirling us around for 10 minutes to a Mozart accompaniment. Admittedly, I felt a little queasy after this display of showmanship, but the majority of

passengers clapped and cheered.

We capped our day trip with a performance of "Don Giovanni" at the Salzburg Marionette Theater (Schwarzstrasse 24; www.marionetten.at). We saved time by reserving our tickets online (35 [euro], or \$42, per person) in advance of the trip. The puppets were exquisite, but the sound system did not do the opera justice.

The Bavarian Alps and the Romantic Road

The next morning we embarked on a scenic drive skirting the Bavarian Alps. We stayed in Das Beck Hotel (fax 011 43 5672 625 22 35 or visit www.welcome.to/hotel-das-beck) in Reutte, Austria. Reutte is less costly than Fussen (on the German side of the border) and is a Rick Steves favorite. We paid 31 [euro] per person, including breakfast.

We made our way to the fairytale castles of Neuschwanstein and Hohenschwangau, having reserved tickets prior to the trip online at www.hohenschwangau.de (17 [euro] per person for both castles). The reservation allowed us to choose an exact time to start our tours and guaranteed entry on the only day we had allotted for this must-see landmark.

The following day we were back on the Autobahn, making our way to Ulm (www.tourismus.ulm.de). Ulm was featured prominently during our German-language class in the Zungenbrecher (tongue twister) "In Ulm, um Ulm, und um Ulm herum."

Ulm features an intriguing mix of modern and medieval architecture. We visited long enough to admire the Ulmer Munster, which boasts the tallest church spire in the world, and to stroll along the Danube.

We soon found ourselves on the Romantic Road (www.romantischestrasse.de) at Nordlingen. We made brief stops here and in Dinkelsbühl but mostly admired the countryside and picturesque small towns from the car.

At one point we found ourselves lost on a road destined for "Umleitung." After unsuccessfully combing the map to determine where we were, we turned to our German-English dictionary, which revealed that Umleitung is German for "detour"! We stopped at a local tourist information center and in a mixture of broken German and English determined the direction we needed to go (the detour was not well marked).

Rothenburg

We arrived in the popular, well-preserved medieval town of Rothenburg ob der Tauber (www.rothenburg.de) just before sundown. We checked into Hotel Gerberhaus (Spitalgasse 25; fax 011 49 9861 86555 or visit www.romanticroad.com/gerberhaus), also booked after reading positive reviews online and exchanging a few e-mails with the proprietors. Once again, the availability of a free computer for guests sealed the deal. It cost 79 [euro], or \$95, per night, including breakfast.

A favorite activity during our two days in Rothenburg was circumnavigating the town wall (approximately two miles). It was both sobering and inspirational to see the stones carrying names of individuals from around the world, purchased to help rebuild this town that was heavily damaged during World War II.

We were also fascinated by the Medieval Crime Museum (www.kriminalmuseum.rothenburg.de), featuring a variety of implements of punishment ranging from torture (the iron maiden) to poetic justice (a double violin that locked bickering spouses face to face) to comical shame masks meant to caricature a particular offense.

On a lighter note, we had plenty of energy after sampling Schneeballen, a local sugary delicacy resembling a frosted snowball,

while sitting and enjoying the vistas in the beautiful town garden.

We departed Rothenburg at sunrise and made our way to the outskirts of Frankfurt to visit a friend. Udo and his wife, Susi, had graciously volunteered their hospitality when they discovered we would be visiting their homeland.

Their apartment was in Konigstein im Taunus (www.koenigstein.de), a town about 30 minutes from downtown Frankfurt. They had an amazing view from which we could watch the sunset over the ruins of a devastated castle. We were delighted when Udo suggested a hike to the castle ruins. Udo's daughter, Katharina, took pride in guiding us up the steps of the tower for a spectacular glimpse of the Frankfurt skyline.

Winding down

We were treated to a traditional German breakfast the following morning and were able to practice our German vocabulary. Susi served up a delectable array of sliced wurst, cheese (Kase), fresh pretzels (Brezeln), crusty bread (Brot), fruit (Obst) and rich coffee (Kaffee).

This sustained us nicely as Udo chauffeured us from Koblenz (www.koblenz.de) to Mainz (www.mainz.de) along the Rhine River. Countless castles stood stoically on the hilltops as we passed. We arrived back in Konigstein as the sun set on our last night in Deutschland.

The next morning, as we drove ourselves to the Frankfurt airport for our return to the U.S., we reflected on the journey and asked ourselves, "Did our trip to Germany and Austria, carefully planned using resources on the Internet, provide the amazing and enriching experience that we'd hoped for?" Our unequivocal answer--"Selbstverstandlich!" ("Of course!").

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